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AN AFRICAN TRAGEDY

BY
R. R. R. DHLOMO

(A Novel in English by a Zulu Writer.)



LOVEDALE INSTITUTION PRESS.

Dedication.

To all those who have not found God's all in all this story—the humble effort of my inspiration—is with my innermost and fervent feelings dedicated !

Preface.

I have been a correspondent of *Ilanga lase Natal* for the past five years, under the nom-de-plume of "Rollie Reggie."

As such, therefore, I have always tried to keep my ears and eyes open to mark any incident in life that may happen to affect the lives of our people—especially the young—in their grim struggles for existence in this tumultuous city of Johannesburg.

This story, therefore, is the outcome of my further efforts—after I had tried to investigate some of the causes which seek to undermine the peacefulness and blessedness of the newly-founded homes of the young married people.

The faults—for which I crave the reader's pardon and sympathy—are many.

R. R. R. D.

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Chapter 1.

EVILS OF TOWN LIFE.

Two reasons made Robert Zulu leave teaching at Siam Village School. The first was that he wanted to get married to Miss Jane Nhlanzeko as soon as possible. But as Jane's father had asked for a silly huge sum of money and other gifts for *llobolo* Robert felt that he could not raise this sum quick enough while teaching—teachers' salaries being anything but lucrative at that time.

So he made up his mind to leave teaching, and go to Johannesburg to look for work. He felt sure that there he could make more money in more ways than one, and that quickly too.

The second reason was that he thought, as most foolish young people think now-a-days, that town life is better in every way than country life; and that for a young, educated man to die having not seen and enjoyed town life was a deplorable tragedy. These excuses made Robert deaf to all the efforts of his parents and friends to dissuade him from going to that most unreliable city of Johannesburg. His final decision therefore, to go

A

to Johannesburg at all hazards, was a blow to his people, who had thought high of him, as a young Christian teacher in the Mission.

This blow was felt even more strongly by his future parents-in-law. But as Robert pointed out to his father-in-law that, unless he reduced his *Ilobolo*, there was no alternative open to him but that of going to Johannesburg to try and raise money quickly, his father-in-law did not argue any further.

He wanted money for his daughter. He had said: "What business has Robert to ask my daughter's hand in marriage if he has no money to pay for her?" This is unfortunately the parrot-cry of many Christian fathers, the costly mistake which, in many cases, results in poor, and financially stranded homes, or driving the young lovers to the terrible alternative of a "Special License," or running away from their homes with disastrous results all too-well known.

Robert Zulu had been in Johannesburg for about two years—as our story begins. During this time, he had been engaged in all sorts of nefarious activities in pursuit of get-me-rich-quick methods. But all these activities, instead of getting him rich only plunged him deeper and deeper in vice and evils.

The first disastrous step he took on his

arrival in Johannesburg was that of his bad choice of companions. When he received his first monthly wages he usually bought himself a few necessities, and then saved the rest for his future plans. But after his choice of companions his earnings and savings steadily, but surely, diminished.

He was now a reckless, dissolute young man. When he received his wages he no longer thought of sending part of it home or banking it. No, Goodness, what for? What fashionable young men, except they be fools thought of banking their money in such a gay, rollicking city as that of Johannesburg? His first thoughts now were always on pleasure. That sort of pleasure for which Johannesburg is so notorious. Pleasure that has caused the sudden, terrible death of many a promising young man or woman. That was Robert's second mistake, which was subsequently to plunge him in terrible and heart-rending tragedies. Yet this error is so seemingly innocent that many young people still fall into it daily in spite of their education and faith. In his heart, Robert heard a soft, warning voice say :—

“Do not! You will be ruined! Think of your duty to God. Think of those you left behind you. Be a man!” Yet another voice

loud and insistent this time rang in his heart :
"Pleasure is the essence of young people's lives here in Johannesburg. Enjoy it, man! You will be loved and admired by lovely, dancing ladies of fashion, if you mix up with the gay throng and let your money and clothes advertise you!"

Robert Zulu soon made friends with a boy working next door. In the course of time they deceived themselves that they were fast and loyal friends. At least that is what Robert thought.

The young man, whose name was John Bolotwa, boasted that what he didn't know in Johannesburg was not worth mentioning.

"Suggest a place, then, where we can enjoy ourselves to-night," said Robert, in reply to this boast.

"Right you are," agreed John eagerly. "I shall call round for you this evening, and take you to a lively place just a few yards from Jeppestown. There, old man," he continued, warming to his subject, "we shall enjoy ourselves like lords for a mere shilling."

When once a young person thinks of pleasure first, it never occurs to him or her that, where pleasure and vice abound, true and loyal friendship never exist. That evening Robert and John went out to enjoy

themselves. They went to Prospect Township—a revolting immoral place; where the black sons and daughters of Africa are kicked about by their unbridled passions as a football is on the playfields. Here one may come across any kind of debased humanity. Ministers—in names and collars only—live in filthy closeness with loose women.

Murders and assaults are committed here with animalish ferocity, through the influence of drinks and faithless women.

Loose, morally depraved women, who parade the Township with uncovered bosoms; clothed in dirty robes. Women, whose sole aim in life is to get money at whatever costs or hazards, their chief traps or snares for obtaining this filthy lucre from the gullible mine boys and unwise educated people being their strong drinks and prostituted bodies.

No wonder Black Africa is cursed! At Prospect Township—which is, by the way, a matter of half-a-mile from the heart of the city of Johannesburg, and a matter of yards from the City Deep and Meyer and Charlton Gold Mines—in spite of the ceaseless activities of the Liquor Staff of the Prospect Township Police Station, to stamp out the Illicit Liquor Traffic—strong and violent drinks are brewed and sold in broad daylight.

To this place then Robert Zulu, the once promising young teacher and the future husband of a true, pure, faithful girl, came of his own free will, through his love of pleasure and his bad choice of companions. The room in which they found themselves was already half full with people of both sexes. The air was reeking with the evil smell of drinks and perspirations. As they entered, Robert shivered involuntarily. He had not bargained for such a scene of pleasure.

At one end of the room an organ was being hammered by a drunken youth. Couples—literally fastened to each other—were swaying giddily wildly, to this barbaric time. In this mood young girls are deflowered in their youth. Yet we hear people wondering why there is so much license among the young people.

Do these people who have the welfare of our nation at heart, ever visit these dark places and try to win back the straying young?

Carrying war only in clean and favourable surroundings; and preaching to the well-to-do and the educated, is no remarkable and self-sacrificing warfare. War, if war it is, should be waged right into the enemies' lines where the source of all evils is.

For after all is said and done what is the use of trying to unite our peoples when their

offsprings wallow in the mud—so to speak? Do Christians who profess to love God, and seek to do His will ever visit such places—not as they do on Sunday afternoons when the people in the yards are already half mad with drinks and evil passions—but in the quiet during the week when these people are more amenable to reason?

Does it occur to their minds that these slaves of vice may be the sheep of whose welfare Christ spoke so eloquently and so feelingly in the 10th Chapter of St. John's Gospel: verse 16?

Pardon my digression, my poor effort being to write the story of Robert Zulu as he handed it to me for publication—not to presume to teach or preach.

Robert felt his heart sinking within him at this scene before him.

No! He did not think of going back—he went inside and sat down beside John on a long bench near the bed.

“Ma-Radebe!” called John, who was quite at home in such places, “Give us two.”

The lady addressed as “Ma-Radebe” was a stout, pretty looking woman of seven-and-twenty, with large, languishing eyes. A glance at her perfect, round, trim figure and at her pretty face gave one the impression that she

was a married lady, and had her own, dear children somewhere in the background.

But when one again remarked her short, daring skirts; and marked her outrageous flirtations, one's opinions as to her being a mother was dashed against the rocks of impossibilities.

The truth was that she had left her lawful husband at Queenstown—and was now living with a “kept” husband without moral or religious scruples.

When John ordered the drinks, he patted her on the shoulder affectionately, and she favoured him with a languishing glance, before she darted outside to execute her orders.

She approached an innocent looking ash-heap; and, after casting hurried glances round, dug quickly, and brought to the surface a small can full of Skokiaan. She poured a quantity of its contents into a jug, and, having replaced the can into the hole, she re-arranged the ash-heap and went into the room. John took the jug. As he did so, all eyes were turned thirstily towards him. Eyes of confirmed slaves of Drink! Lost children of Light!

John handed the jug to Robert.

“Take a sip, man,” he said pleasantly. “It will help to drive away all your doubts and fears.”

Robert took a step backward.

"I don't drink," he said, in alarm.

"Who said you drink? I only said 'Just a sip'—a sip is not a drink, surely."

"Please, I'd rather not, old man," protested Robert nervously.

John uttered an impatient oath under his breath.

"Do not be a fool, Bob"—he said persuasively. "Take a sip, and act like a man."

At this juncture the organ suddenly stopped—and Robert felt rather than saw, that he was the cynosure of all eyes. He grew hot all over. Beads of perspiration stood on his brow. Then he made a serious mistake, he hesitated perceptibly.

Hesitation!

When you are in a crisis, Robert, never, oh! never hesitate. Act on the first dictum of your heart! When John saw him hesitate, he knew he had won him.

He smiled grimly, as the serpent must have smiled in the Garden of Eden, when Eve, instead of fleeing from its fascination, stood to parley with it.

"Sis!" exclaimed a young girl fashionably dressed. "Isn't he a coward!"

"Perhaps he is thinking of his mother at

home," said another calmly flicking the ash from her cigarette. "John," she added with a sneer, "why did you bring a Christian here?"

"But to drink is no sin," interjected a depraved young man. "The Bible does not say it is a sin."

There was a laugh at this irreverent talk. This laugh proved to be Robert's undoing. He took a step forward and thrust his face close to the depraved young man's.

"Say that again . . . you . . . you damn fool!"

The depraved one retreated in alarm at this unexpected terrible outburst.

"Don't run away, Jim," cried the cigarette-girl, "stab him with your knife!"

John hastily stepped between them.

"No harm meant, Bob," he said in a conciliating tone. "Prove to these silly girls that you are no coward and drink this glass with me."

There was a brief silence, during which the angels' above held their breath in fear and dismay.

Then Robert—without a word—took the glass from John's hand, and drained it. This cool and manly act brought forth cries of delight from those in the room. The girls eagerly

surrounded Robert, asking him to dance with them, which he did.

Robert Zulu was now lost. From that night, he had drunk and drunk until he became a hopeless drunkard. His physical health was now impaired. He mixed with loose women; enjoyed their company when their husbands were at work. To-day young people marry to give chances to their rapacious brothers and sisters, who never hesitate to pay attentions to married young husbands or wives. The —— Hall was now his favourite place of amusement. Here he was always sure to find a lonely girl, who would enjoy his company, although on the morrow she would be receiving the attentions of another young man.

These girls pride themselves that they can steal the husbands of any silly Christian girl once he puts his foot in the Dancing Hall—and his lips on the flowing bowl. They generally put their boasts into practice too—with tragical results to the newly married and quiet young girl.

It was only after the following ghastly tragedy that Robert began to think of his home and the faithful girl, whose letters still continued to arrive monthly. These he always answered profusely, and thus deceived the

simple-minded country people. They thought he was still doing well, and consequently swallowed whatever he told them with child-like gullibility.

Then the terrible diversion came with the suddenness of a storm, and brought Robert Zulu to his distorted senses with a jerk, and incidentally, sent him dashing homewards as fast as the 8.45 p.m. express to Durban could carry him.



Chapter II.

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS.

One afternoon Robert paid a visit to his friends at Newclare Location, and stayed there until very late. He had hoped he would be lucky enough to be allowed to board a tram-car, but this was totally denied him by the tram-conductors, so he had, perforce, to walk back to town.

The night was dark enough to mislead anyone abroad, how much so Robert who had never walked to and from Newclare. He was never out to this part of the town until late. Before very long, he had lost his way in the heart of Vrededorp. At that moment rain began to fall in large drops. It became bitterly cold. He had to stop continually and take cover under verandahs to escape from the drenching rain, which now poured down in fierce torrents.

Just when he was in the heart of Vrededorp he glanced at his wrist watch. It was half-past-eleven!

The hour of grace to the Town Natives had long since passed. That hour which means such a lot to the Johannesburg Native.

“Are you qualified to be out at this hour of the night? Do you know where you are? You are in danger of arrest—do you know that?”

These thoughts flashed through Robert’s mind as he walked briskly through the dark streets of Slum-land.

He had forgotten his Certificate—therefore was not qualified to be out at that hour.

He did not know exactly where he was—therefore, was at a loss to account satisfactorily for his being there.

He knew he was in danger of arrest.

His position was very grave. He quickened his steps, towards Ferrairastown in the distance. As he turned round a corner, a cool voice addressed him, from the shadows.

“Hey—wena. Special!”

Robert turned round and faced two stalwart Zulu policemen, who were eyeing him suspiciously. He became desperate and thought quickly. Then he fumbled in his coat pockets as if he were looking for his special Pass. Finally he drew forth from his pocket a slip of written paper.

He knew, as everyone knows, that most of these Zulu Police who patrol the streets are ignorant and cannot read a line in English to save their souls. One took the piece of paper

and scanned it under the light cast by the street lamp.

"Where are you going to?" he asked foolishly.

"It is written on that paper," answered Robert, in order to gain time to think and act!

They both bent over the slip of paper pretending to read it.

In spite of their ignorance, they seemed to suspect something in that paper. Robert saw his danger. Without hesitation he cried hoarsely :

"Look! Look! They are murdering that man!"

The two Zulus turned involuntarily to the direction indicated by Robert.

Robert saw his chance, and grasped it.

He made a sudden, swift dash.

The whole incident occupied a few minutes. Robert's daring bid for liberty was so sudden; so coolly calculated that for a space of a moment the Policemen eyed each other vacantly. Robert dashed round the first corner and raced up the dip towards Ferrairastown like a flash of lightning, so to speak.

Pheep! Pheep! Pheep! The {thrill, heart-agitated notes of the Police whistle rang through the stormy night. The Police were hot in pursuit.

The rain aided Robert now, because the people were all indoors and the sound of the whistle was drowned in the fury of the storm.

He raced on and on until he came to Ferrairastown near the Native Affairs Department. He slackened his pace, as he came to that brighter part of the City. He went to a yard in Marshall Street, where a friend of his dwelt.

He found his friend gone, but as there was a party of four young men in the room, he decided to wait for his friend.

Presently a Blantyre, who was one of the party, suggested a quiet game of cards. The play began quietly, until stakes ran high, when it became a real gamble of life and death.

A bottle of brandy was brought from under the mattress, and glasses tinkled as the gamblers refreshed themselves.

There were three Blantyres and one Xosa besides Robert in the room. Their eyes were now blood-shot; and from their lips came forth profane oaths and exclamations as the fortune swayed unsteadily this, and that, way.

"Don't cheat there, you hell!" roared a ferocious looking Blantyre, as he saw the Xosa deftly slip his remaining card into his coat sleeve.

"Who's cheating?" demanded the Xosa, vehemently. "Say that again—and I'll make you eat your foul words, you"

Sambo, the waiter at Parktown, lifted his hand impressively.

"Sh - - - - -" he said warningly, "Do not begin a row. Remember we are not far from Marshall Square here."

"Damn you and your Marshall Square," cried the Xosa wildly. "Tell your friend to call me a cheater again and you'll see fire."

"You are a cheater," interjected the Blantyre; his right hand unconsciously slipping into his trousers' pocket. I'll say that whenever I see you cheating—hear that?"

And he thrust his black distorted face forward until it stood close to the Xosa's.

The Xosa muttered something inaudible under his breath, but wisely said nothing.

He had noticed the significant movement of the Blantyre's right hand as it slid towards his pocket. A knife—ugly and sharp—was in that pocket, opened and ready for its ghastly work.

Robert was now shuffling and reshuffling the cards with the hand of an expert.

Rip!

B

He placed them on the table with that familiar ripping sound that an expert gambler knows how to produce.

"Cut there!" he called.

And the game began in deadly earnestness again. Robert was steadily winning now. In his pockets was £30 in solid gold. More was steadily coming into his pockets. Then a sudden catastrophe occurred.

"Hey—you fool!" was the first sentence he heard. Then he saw a flash of a knife as it descended on the Xosa.

"Hold him, you fellows," cried the Xosa in terror, as he, too, saw the infuriated Blantyre make a lunge towards him.

"Help! He is going to—to—Ah! My God! he has stabbed me!"

The murdered Xosa dropped to the floor without a further sound, as the Blantyre plunged his murderous knife into his heart.

"Cheating again, you swine!" cried the Blantyre fiendishly, "Take that to Hell with you!"

Before the others knew what had really taken place the murderer was making a spring towards the door. Robert tried to bar his way. The savage Blantyre smiled grimly.

"Open the door there or I'll finish you, too."

Robert suddenly sprang to one side of the door, as the Blantyre darted towards him.

For a moment after he had fled those in the room stood and stared at one another stupidly. They could see the Xosa boy lying on the pool of blood on the floor—dead.

As they beheld him thus, they were seized with panic. They rushed towards the door, stumbling over one another, pushing, fighting, falling.

“Stop! Stop!” shouted the next door Native. “Stop, and give an account to the police of this affair.”

But the others were panic-struck. They fought their way to the street, and stood there dazed and staring—a strange, scared-faced group. Robert did not stand for a long time here. He knew that all his companions were Blantyres. They might falsely accuse him of the murder, since the murderer was one of their own countrymen, and he—Robert—was the only Zulu there.

Without a moment's hesitation he took to his heels, and before the semi-dazed Blantyres could guess his purpose he was around the corner of West Street and racing up Fox Street as fast as his legs could carry him.

Robert did not know how he reached his rooms at Kaptein Street, Hospital Hill. He did not know how he managed to pass the City without any Police barring his way. He was still terribly agitated when he flung his door open and staggered into his room.

His hands shook so violently that, when he tried to pour himself a stiff dose of brandy, the bottle dropped to the floor and was shattered into a thousand pieces.

Flight!

Yes, he must fly! That was the only possible solution to the problem.

"Thank God - - - No, the Devil," he said, hoarsely "that I have enough money to see me through. I must pack and clear off as soon as I can."

These wild thoughts raced through his brains as he undressed feverishly. As he undressed he saw his Registration Certificate lying on the dressing table where he had forgotten it. "To think that I've been through all this trouble through forgetting this slip of a paper behind," he muttered, as he flung himself on his bed. When he awoke, the next morning his brains were clearer, although his head still throbbed painfully.

"I must bluff my Boss," he thought furiously. "I'll ask James to wire to me and say that my father is dead at home." "Yes," he continued grimly, "that is my only hope of escaping this trouble."

He did as he had decided to do, with the result that the next morning a telegram arrived which he took in to his employer with a sorrowful look that fitted the occasion.

"I am sorry you are going so suddenly Robert," said his boss, as he read the lying telegram through.

"I hope you will soon come back to your work."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir," was all Robert had to say. He went to the Booking Office in Plein and Eloff Streets, and reserved his seat for the 8.45 p.m. down Express. Thank goodness, there was no necessity for him to go to the Pass Office and spend half a day there waiting for his pass to be endorsed.

When the Express steamed out of platform No. 5 that night, Robert opened the copy of that evening's City Late Edition of *The Star* and read:

"Murder in the City" ran the headline.

"The police made another arrest in connection with the murder of a Xosa, Jim Dutywa,

on Saturday night at Yard No 10, Marshall Street, Ferrairastown. There is still every hope to believe that startling developments will result. For, according to the story of the arrested Natives, there were other boys in the room that night whose identities they do not know. Unfortunately these Natives' whereabouts are at present unknown." "The police, however," concluded the report, "hope to get on the track of these boys without delay."

Robert smiled grimly, as he folded his paper deliberately and lit his cigarette. It was not until after they had passed Volksrust, however, that he felt his old former self. When he awoke the next morning, they were at Ladysmith.

"What kind of welcome would he receive at home?" This thought worried him.

He did not care if his parents-in-law rejected him. If they did, there were many girls in the mission station waiting for heroes from Johannesburg. These, he felt sure, would gladly jump at him. He had money, which is all that a modern, educated girl cares for in a young man.

Chapter III.

A CHRISTIAN HOME.

"At last, my child; Robert is coming home," said Mrs. Nhlauzeko to her eldest daughter, Jane.

"Oh! mother," exclaimed Jane impulsively. "I don't know whether I ought to be pleased or not." Jane Nhlauzeko was a lovely girl in full bloom of womanhood. Two years and a half ago, she had fallen in love with Robert Zulu. Robert was teaching at that time at the Siam Village School. As we have said, Robert was a promising young man in the village, but Jane knew that his one failing was his love for drink. But it is not rare to see a young woman undertaking the venture of marriage with a man, who, notwithstanding his other commendable merits, shows a dangerous tendency for love of drink. She counts upon her influence probably being strong enough to reform her husband. But generally she is doomed to bitter disappointment.

The craving for drink returns sooner or later with such intensity as to bear down all interests whatsoever, and the drinker's unhappy wife has a long and dreary life-time

in which to regret her easy faith. The worst of it is that the habitual drunkard often has so many engaging qualities, which mask his specific flaw; but the best of these traits disappear once his vice has developed and thoroughly taken hold of him. Robert had solemnly promised Jane never to drink again.

He had kept this promise manfully, as we have seen, until he fell, when he chose John D. Bolotwa as his friend. Whether these thoughts crossed Jane's mind at this moment or not we cannot say. Suffice it to say she was feeling very uneasy as Robert's homecoming was heralded by his letters. She trusted him. She hoped against hope that he had kept his promise, and refrained from drink. Yet she was afraid of goodness knows what evils. This fear made itself felt in her tones as she spoke with her mother.

"Why do you say that, Jane?" asked her mother, sharply.

"Mother, you know what queer stories we always hear about the life of the young people in Johannesburg. I—I fear for Robert."

"Jane!" Mrs. Nhlauzeko's tone was severe. "Never look on one side of things, especially if it happens to be a dark side. You should not have doubts at all about your future husband."

"Yes, mother," said Jane meekly.

"We have reasons to believe that Robert's mode of living in Johannesburg has been both pure and above suspicion?"

"How, mother?"

Mrs. Nhlauzeko wiped her hands on her pinafore and assumed a judicial expression. "Because," she began impressively, "if Robert had been living unreliably in Johannesburg we would have long since heard of it." "Evil tidings travel apace," she quoted fervently.

"Yes, mother," said Jane softly.

Jane was taught to listen to and do whatever her parents chose to call their will. This is a common error of many Christians to-day. They rarely encourage their children to voice their own feelings, even in matters which concern the children themselves. Many marriages are still arranged and conducted by many modern Christians without consulting the contracting parties. How far this error is responsible for some of the misunderstandings between the parents and their otherwise praiseworthy sons and daughter it is not my intention to probe here.

Foolish and misguided woman—Mrs. Nhlauzeko! She forgot that the greatest and most dastardly evils that are perpetrated in large towns are not all known far and wide.

In most instances, these crimes and vices are only made public where the evil-doers are forced to confess their wrongs and misdeeds either by the Mighty hand of God or by the long arm of Justice.

Foolish woman!

Robert Zulu arrived the following afternoon and was met by the school children at the station.

Robert was fashionably dressed, his whole appearance striking and impressive. Jane marked all these changes with a sigh of admiration not unmixed with fear. It is not necessary to dwell on how Robert was received by his country people in general; and by his people-in-law in particular; and by his Jane in private. These things are better imagined than described.

Soon after his arrival, amidst pomp and feasts considered so necessary by these people, the wedding of Robert Zulu and Jane Nhlahuzeko was solemnized in the Siam Church. Mr. Nhlahuzeko did not even worry to find out about his son-in-law's past life in Johannesburg. Very few parents (if any at all) do that sort of thing these days.

A young man from town, coming to the country to live, marry and bring forth children

should be subjected to some tests about his life in these towns. If parents would only concentrate on this question—instead of on *llobolo custom*—a great deal of trouble would be spared the young married people. Amidst cheers and showers of good wishes, these two young people entered into the grim battle field of matrimony: the field of marriage life—where many enter with glowing faces and bright eyes and hearts beating with hopes and joy—shortly to come forth terribly mutilated and maimed for life.

Things went on smoothly as things are prone to do at first. After two years had passed without any signs of coming children, people began to whisper:

“What is wrong?”

“Oh! that matter is with the girl,” said an old hag—spitefully “These educated girls are said to practise birth-control, because they don’t want children.” People talked and talked until Nhlauzeko and his wife were really upset.

“Suppose we consult Inyanga and find out what is wrong with our child,” said Mrs. Nhlauzeko, tremulously.

“That wouldn’t be bad, at all,” agreed Nhlauzeko. “But as we are Christians, people will begin talking.”

"Should we let mere public opinion deter us from what we consider to be our duty to our only child?" insisted his wife.

"You are quite right, Gertrude," said Nhla-uzeko.

On the following day they went with Jane to the Inyanga. They did not tell Robert this.

The 'Nyanga, like the rest of his kind, subjected the poor girl to various, humiliating and disgusting examinations and questionings.

Native doctors never spare their patients. The poor girl drank bitter herbs, was cut on the body and rubbed with a black powder in the incisions.

They returned home.

Robert's craving for drinks was now mastering him. He drank and drank and drank until people began to fear.

His loving and faithful wife was now a skeleton. Her once beautiful face and figure were now a sorrowful sight to behold. Rings hung round her hollow eyes. Yet she never complained. Even when Robert slept away from home. Even when he was reported to be going about with Maritzburg girls at night.

She only prayed the harder and more fervently to God to bless her with a child.

She went to the women's prayer meeting and after confessing all her sins (which she hadn't) she again gave herself wholly to God. These zealous women took this hopeless cry of the young wife and poured it into the presence of Him who knows all.

Ah! If they had only known! In many cases God, in withholding from our grasp something we long for, does so for our own good. If we could only understand the working of His Will, we would never persist in asking what is usually denied us.

We would never persist because it sometimes happens that at last God hears our prayers and grants us our wishes. Then, we find out—too late! that God, in declining to grant us our favours, did so knowing the results that would follow these favours being granted. When we have got our favours, we sometimes find out that they only serve to create a greater gulf between us and God's will. We find ourselves questioning the will of God.

Jane Zulu asked God to bless her with a child.

At long last God did. Did she enjoy peace afterwards?

Chapter IV.

SINLESS CHILD OF SIN.

“The Leopard cannot change its spots.” There is a time when a human being reaches that period in life when he cannot change or alter his habits. It was so now with Robert Zulu. Do what he would he could not stop drinking; he could not stop running after other men’s wives and daughters. His blood, so used to violent activities, cried aloud for gratification. The louder his conscience wailed within him, the deeper he plunged into his evil practices, thinking that by so doing he could drown the voice of his conscience.

He knew he was to blame for the present state of affairs in his house. People had blamed the woman for their being childless. He knew that he was the cause of that.

But people always blame the woman—they never tackle the man. To-day there are many childless marriages through the impotency of men. People never trouble to find out why this should be so.

Oh, no! the woman carries the blame—the shame and the humiliation of being childless.

Although it was shocking to the moral sense of Jane, splendidly equipped for wifehood and motherhood as she was, to find herself fettered for life in a joyless union to an exhausted voluptuary, she had, by sheer force of will power, to yield to Robert's mad embraces, hoping while not hoping that these embraces would finally bring her to her long prayed for ambition—motherhood.

"God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform," said some one long ago.

Jane was blessed (?) with a baby boy.

"God moves"

As the child grew, it developed a mysterious illness, which baffled Native Nyangas. People became genuinely alarmed.

"What sickness was this that was attacking this innocent Angel?"

The child was at last taken to Doctor R—— at Pietermaritzburg. After examining the child, he shook his grey head sadly.

"This child is suffering from Ophthalmia, which may result in total and incurable blindness," he said gravely. "I think one of you," he continued glancing sympathetically at Jane's poor face, "is infected with the terrible disease. It may be possible to assume that your husband transferred this disease to you.

If a woman so infected bears children at all the chances are that they in turn will suffer infection in the process of birth."

The effect of these words on the overwrought, half-demented mother was pitiful. Without a cry she fell on the floor, and wept as if her heart would break.

When they reached home, she refused to take the child in her arms again.

"Take it away, mother! Take it away!" she cried.

"Jane, my child," pleaded her mother, "this is God's will—bear with it."

"Take it away! take it away, mother!" she cried, wringing her hands and tearing her dresses to shreds in a frenzy of madness. "There is no God, mother."

"Hush Jane; hush, my girl." Her mother's eyes filled with tears. "Hush, do not speak like that, Jane."

"How can God be so cruel as to treat me like that?"

"It is His will"

"How can it be His will? When all these years I have been living a clean and pure life. When I married Robert I was still as clean as when I was born. Do these things mean

nothing to Him? Answer me—mother—” cried the demented girl—“answer me, Ma, before I lose my reason.”

Her mouth was foaming her eyes dilating; her face wet with perspiration.

“Perhaps you are not so pure in His sight as you think you are Jane,” said her mother. “Look at your husband for an instance, perhaps this may be through his evil ways.”

“My child,” moaned Jane, “poor, poor child of sin.”

She staggered on her feet and stood staring wildly at her child.

“Take him—dear,” begged her mother. Jane took the child from her mother’s arms. For a moment, it seemed as if her madness had left her, for she bent down, and kissed her poor child tenderly on the lips.

There was a silence.

The child opened its eyes and looked at its mother fixedly. Then it smiled. Mrs. Nhla-uzeko patted its tiny form gently. Feeling this gentle caress, the child fell asleep again.

Robert was not at home, when all this took place. He was in pursuit of his pleasures. On the following day the child was taken to the hospital at Maritzburg.

C

Jane was pitiful to behold. She was wasted and gone. The child did not live long. It died a month after being admitted at the hospital.

God's power of protection only saved Jane from losing her brains at all. God manifested His love for her— by strengthening her soul against the terrible results that would have followed such terrible exposures.

Were it not through the fact that Jane had been brought up as a God-fearing girl—she would have certainly gone mad under the strain of her physical and spiritual tests.

“God moves”



Chapter V.

GOD AND THE SINNER.

"I wonder how we can get rid of this fellow," growled Daniel Zibi. "Ever since he came back from Johannesburg—he's playing havoc with our girls."

"What I consider to be damnable cheek," snapped Jonathan Moya, "is the way he monopolises the girls as if he were not married."

"To cap that cheek," continued Daniel, "the girls know he is married and neglects his wife—but still run after him."

"I wonder how we can get rid of him"—said Jonathan grimly.

They were talking in whispers these two—as they were sitting in their room that afternoon. They were educated young men—these two—but their talks were always on girls and how to "trap" them. Their views were evil and dastardly, and clashed unpleasantly with their appearance.

They were talking of Robert Zulu, who had, evidently, crossed their evil paths—as was his way of living.

"I have got a plan of sending him across the Jordan," whispered Daniel.

"Let's hear it, man."

"I know that Robert is now after my girl—Josephine," began the devil incarnate. "She is working at Longmarket Street—near West Street. The girl still loves me, and I have every reason to believe that she loves us both. Now," he lowered his voice—"I am going to visit her to-night before Robert does. When I am there there won't be any more fear—listen . . ." and continued to outline his satanic plan of murdering his own fellow-man through the woman.

"That's fine—wetu," applauded his friend, when Daniel had ceased speaking. "See the girl to-night without fail."

Daniel Zibi did see the girl. Robert Zulu, who was still on the track of his pleasures—went to visit the same girl the following night. It was after that visit he felt his sojourn on earth drawing to an untimely but tragical end.

When he reached home the next morning, he did not notice anything unusual. He did not notice that a shadow hung over his house and cast gloom over it. He did not notice that his neighbours eyed him with apparent reproach as he tottered to his house.

He did not notice anything, because he was beyond the power of noticing earthly things.

He did not sleep that night. He couldn't. He fell on the floor—and between terrifying twists—and heart rending groans—his past life flitted passed him, as a scene does in a motion-picture screen. It flitted past and left his poor soul sorely agitated.

His wife rushed for help. When the people arrived they found Robert foaming in the mouth. His body was quivering and intensely hot. As soon as the older men had examined him, they eyed one another significantly and shook their heads sadly.

Those two young scoundrels had got him. For the first time in his life Robert Zulu felt the pressure of the Hand of God.

"Where is the Minister?" he gasped. The Minister soon made his appearance. The air in the room became tense, and fraught with tragic issues.

"Ho hold me up," he panted; willing hands obliged.

"I—I wish to—to confess some—something."

He was given a glass full of fresh milk. This seemed to revive him, for he continued slowly:

"I was responsible for our sad and tragical married life. I should not have married at all.

While in Johannesburg, I contracted a violent disease from loose women. The doctor at the Rietfontein Chronic Home warned me against marrying before applying to him first for a medical certificate certifying that I was fit to marry. I did not . . . heed his warning . . . Oh! Give me water!—”

“Our first born was the victim of my disease,” he continued wearily. “I tried hard to fight against my craving for drinks—but in vain. I ran after women and girls; neglecting my wife.” “Last night,”—his voice was now feeble and inaudible “I was ‘trapped’ by some fellows in town.”

Silence!

Men exchanged grim glances. Women wept bitterly. Jane, the ever-true and entirely self-sacrificing wife never left her unworthy husband’s side. All this was through him, but still she never thought of running away from him. Now she crouched besides her dying husband and weeping as if her poor already too-tempted heart would break asunder.

“My sins,” Robert’s voice broke the silence, feebly. “My sins are past forgiveness.”

“Hush, my son,” said the Minister fervently. “*Not passed* forgiveness, ‘The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all our sins.’”

"Does it?" whispered Robert, as beads of perspiration poured down his forehead, "Then pray for me."

As the minister's voice rose and fell in a passionate intercession to Christ for the soul of this poor man, Robert ceased breathing heavily. His groans became quieter and more peaceful.

When they rose to their feet—Robert Zulu had passed away.

As the minister covered his face, a vivid flash of lightning shot into the room followed immediately by a terrific peal of thunder.

Rain began to fall with a fury of a storm.

The Minister stood calmly before the awe-inspired gathering and opening his Bible read *
"Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit or whither shall I flee from Thy Presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there !

"If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the Sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

*Psalm 139.

"Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee ;
but the night shineth as the day : the darkness
and the light are both alike to Thee !"

He closed his Bible.

Had the Boundless Love of Jesus revealed
itself to Robert Zulu during that brief hour of
his visitation ?

Who knows ?

"God moves in a mysterious way"



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